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Melodies and Mountaineers

Isabella
McLennan
McMeekin

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MELODIES AND MOUNTAINEERS

"LITTLE LOG CABIN"

Melodies *and* Mountaineers

By

ISABELLA McLENNAN McMEEKIN

1921

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Dedication

It is with fond affection that I dedicate these verses to the Folk of Line Fork, Letcher County, Kentucky.

Isabella McLennan McMeekin

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Music of Mountains

Music of Mountains
  And song of the Hills,
Rhythm of Forests
  And tune of the Rills.

The dark is a drum
  The wind is a flute,
Silence is fingering
  The strings of her lute.

Immortal the singing
  Yet mortal ones may
Hear vaguely its echo
  At dawn o' the day.

Lullaby

Little One, sleep,
Shadow wings creep,
Sleepy One, sleep
Here in the nest.

Little One, dream,
Forest fires gleam,
Dreamy One, dream
Safe and at rest.

Softly I sing,
Softly I swing,
Loving, I sing
You at my breast.

Summer Is Green

Summer is green,
Winter is white,
Daylight is golden,
And blue is the night.

Ships on the sea
Venture and pass,
Luck to the sailor!
Love to his lass!

Yellow and grey
Butterflies roam,
Dear is the fire-lit
Hearth of my Home.

Mountain Peace

Mountain peace
Is like a flower
Whose one brief hour
Enhance its dear loveliness.

Fragrance sweet
As mignonette
Can we forget
Or ever lose its hauntingness?

A Song

"Adam delved
And Eve span,"
It shall end
As it began.

"Gay go up
And gay go down,"
The dusty road
Leads but to town.

"Howdy, Stranger,
Spend the day,"
When Judgment's coming
Who can say?

Stormy Night

'Tis such a night of wind and rain
As city folk will never know,
For what dream they, who're safe at home
Of how the storm may Grow and Grow?
A creature it of mighty strength
How hungrily the great beasts roar,
And Loneliness, a frightened child,
Is standing there, beside my door.

Fairy Wind

Fairy Wind,
  From Wonderland,
I see You pass
  And kiss my hand.

Compensation

The golden leaves
Float from the autumn trees
And drop casually
To the ground.
One moment
They have of Freedom,
Before it
They were bound,
After it
They shall rot,
Are they the less golden
For all of that?

Rythm

The wind blows forever,
  The river flows on,
Singing, it never
  Doth vary its song.

Grey Winter Trees

Oh stark and lonely trees
Who make me think
Of hungry children
Crouched together
Comfortless,
Are you the same
As those most proud and radiant
Courtiers,
To whom I curtesied
In green July?

Only the Road —

Only the Road
  My longing knows,
And It will not tell
  Where my spirit goes.

The Manuscript

A turquoise sky
  And a silver sea,
Three painted gulls
  And a cedar tree.

Unfinished sketch
  In a manuscript
The artist paused
  E'er the brush was dipped.

Another stroke
  And a huge grey sea
Will cover the gulls
  And the cedar tree.

As life was blue
  In my childhood's age
Will ink smear black
  On the "finis" page?

Over the Mountains

Over the mountain,
(Sing, sing low)
Over the hill,
Springtime is singing,
(Soft and low)
As maidens will,
Only her lovers
(Still, be still)
Hear aught of the singing
(Soft and low)
Over the hill.

Depression

Black and huge
  The Mountains lie,
Dying Beasts
  Beneath the sky.

Impotent
  And little, I
Pity them,
  And weary, sigh.

A Thought

A single flower
  That scents an hour
Of drab reality
  Is proven worth
Of destined birth
  And of Christianity.

Spring Song

The little birds
  Sing roundelay,
And gayly make
  A holiday.

The vagrant winds
  Like children run
And romp beneath
  The morning sun.

My heart is glad
  For nothing more
Than that the spring
  Is at the door.

Sleeping Shadows

Under the trees
The shadows lie
Like tired children
Sleeping after play.
Earth is their Mother
And she sings them lullaby.
Flowers are sweet
And forests green,
Winds are soft
And dreams come true,
Shadow is a velvet cloak
And sleep, dear heart, beneficent.

Autumn Song

Oh scarlet leaves
  Are lovely things,
Which Autumn as
  A favour brings.
My happiness
  Is glad and sings,
For scarlet leaves
  Are lovely things.

Green Cheese

I'll crumble yon pallid moon
And build me castles
In far off Spain,
A galleon cloud
Shall bear me thence
Adventuring
Through black and gold
Enameled nights
Like this,
Whose spell
Is as a cloak
Enfolding me.

Young April

Young April is a charming maid,
  But newly come to town,
I met her in a forest glade
  And stopped to praise her gown.

A gorgeous frock of palest green
  Methought it passing fair,
"Perhaps she had to Paris been,
  Or was it sent from there?"

She laughed and shook her pretty head,
  (A most engaging elf)
"Ah, no, young Sir" she coyly said,
  "I made it all myself."

Fate

Every seed brings forth a flower,
Every love, one perfect hour,
Therefore take what the Gods may send
In recompense of the bitter end.

London Bridge Has Fallen Down

London Bridge has fallen down,
  Still the River flows;
Hopeful hearts go up to Town,
  Still grey sorrow grows.

Silver bells are very sweet
  Up a country lane,
Have you heard the broken feet
  Stumbling after gain?

Sing a song of sixpence, Oh
  And a scarlet coat,
We who found the sixpence know
  It wasn't worth a groat.

Promise

The River hurries by
  On silver sandled feet,
There's promise in the sky
  That He and Love shall meet.

Rose Song

"Roses are sleeping
And night winds sigh,
Cease from their weeping
E'er Life flow by."

"Roses red
Soon lie dead,
Why should I cease my weeping?"
"Each new spring
Will roses bring,
Not dead they lie,
But sleeping."

Heart that is broken,
Forget thy pain,
God sends for token
Roses again."

Happiness

Ring her round with roses,
  Roses white and gold,
Crown her head with roses,
  My love is white and gold.

Make a song of gladness,
  Sing it now with me,
I am filled with gladness,
  My love is here with me.

The Blind Man

"The Spring, you say is here?
Ah, yes, I smell the April wind.
You found some violets in the wood,
And all the jonquils are in bloom?
They are yellow, like the sunshine,
I remember that.
I will sit here,
On the bench beside the door,
Tell me of them once again,
White violets
And rows of golden jonquils
Standing upright, in the good brown earth,
I saw them once
Myself."

The Passing

One day in September
The summertime passes,
Suddenly hearing
Her skirts in the grasses,
I wake from my dreaming,
But scarcely
A shadow has shifted, I wonder
If summer was passing,
Or was it my childhood?
What matter? I'm ready,
Fond youth and frail summer, Adieu,
Soon shall come winter, and with it
My work.

Beyond

Open moor and spacious sky,
  The haze of blue September,
In a dark grave I must lie
  But this I shall remember.

The Answer

Last night
I listened
While the people talked.
They said,
"That mountaineers
Were brutal,
That feuds were merely politics,
And there was no Romance;
Should they, therefore, show you
Truly,
As photographed in prose,
Or, rather,
Sugar-coat you
For the Public Fancy?"
They talked as if you were
"Exhibit A,"
Rather are you
Like the definition some one gave
Of Woman,
"Like the rest of the world,
But one degree more human,"
You are not as feather-fine

As last night's Folk,
Yet are You
As True,
And Good,
And sometimes — Beautiful,
As They.
Your hospitality
Of bread,
And beans,
And "Spend the Night"
And "Come again,"
Is more sincere than theirs.
You're trigger-quick,
But trigger-kind;
Moon-shine drunk,
But who has heard
Of Mountain Funk?
Philosophers and Poets
Weavers and Workers,
You and They
Are much alike.
What man was there
Who has not,
Within his heart,
Agreement with your singing?
"Beef steak when I'm hungry,
Corn-licker when I'm dry,

Pretty women when I'm lonely
And Heaven when I die."
This is my answer,
And this my song,
Is their's a better one?

My Lesson

They taught me many things
Beyond the Land of Copy Books,
These Mountaineers,
To whom
I owe a debt
Of Love.
To rise at five o'clock,
To build the fire,
And cook whatever food there was,
To leave the house
Ship-shape,
And get to school on time,
To salute
My flag,
And teach the lesson for the day,
To enjoy utterly
The good hot dinner
Which a neighbor cooked for us,
To kill snakes,
To chop small trees,
And watch for "sang,"
To work all day
And sleep all night,
In quietness
Among the hills.

The Gleaners

They are old and grey
Though not with years,
Their backs are bent with weariness
And yet their youth
Was yesterday,
A tragic end, you say?
And yet
Though tired with life,
They once did live,
Were young, till dirt and toil
Parched lands and ugly pain
Clutched at their throats
And choked
Young lovliness.
Once, but yesterday,
They sang.
It is those,
Drones of the world,
Painted dummies,
Velvet clad and lustreless,
For these your pity,
Who having never lived,
Do not grow old.

Heaven and Hell

Battle,
Murder
And Sudden Death.
Beauty
That thrills
With every breath.
Such are the mountains
And such their folk,
God is their Vision
But Hell their Yoke.

The Woman's Work

Kill a sheep,
And pack him in,
The men must eat
When they have worked,
Beans and corn bread,
Cucumbers
And onions,
Honey and sour milk,
Coffee, strong coffee,
Fill the cups,
Men who grub and haul,
Who swing the mattock and the ax,
Who cut great logs
And drag them,
They are hungry folk,
Go, kill the sheep,
The kittle 's on the boil.

Aunt Katie

She is bent and old,
Life and its work
Have bowed her head
And made deep wrinkles in her patient face.
Necessity is a stern Master
He has stood behind her
With a whip,
Poverty
Dirt
And Weariness,
A meek submittal
Because there was no other way.
Are there compensations?
Yes, there must be
For her face is kindly
And goodliness is in her eyes,
But what they are
I cannot say.
May Heaven grant her Peace
And Joy.

Aunt Katie, Uncle Henry and Two of Their Grandchildren

Uncle Henry

Uncle Henry is Aunt Katie's man
And her companion,
Old Age
And Drudgery
Have stood beside them,
Yet at evening
When they tilt back their chairs,
(Rush bottom ones, caned by his hand)
And sit in the doorway,
Smoking their pipes
And gazing
Into the purple distance
Where the mountains fade,
Then there is another guest
For I watched and saw him enter,
Up the steep and crooked path
He climbed,
And stood beside the door.
They smiled

And called him "Friend"
Nor minded that his name
Was Death,
For well they knew, that through the years
He had been Love.

Emma

Emma lives over the mountain
And walks alone,
Between its tall trees,
On her way to school.
She is silent,
Quaint and very solemn
In her new red calico dress.
The other children
Do not play with her.
She sits in lonely solitude
Dreaming of the Little Folk
Who dwell in the forest
And walk with her
Over the mountain.
They are her Friends,
These books
And boisterous ones
Are shadows,
She sees them, that is all,
Her spirit walks alone
Child, she is, of mountain quietude
Whose cloak is all of dreams.

Orpha

Orpha was sixteen
And quite conscious of the fact.
She had a georgette waist, a rhinestone comb
And a ruby ring,
(The stone was pink glass, but still it was
A Ruby Ring,)
Her beau had given it to her
And it meant
LOVE.
He went to Oklahoma
And the girl
Found money and followed Him
Across the Mountain
He had left and she was too shy
To buy a ticket,
So she came home again,
The Ruby Ring was gone,
And with it, Youth.

Johnnie

Johnnie is my pet,
A delicate little thing,
He has the most intriguing ways,
A bubbly giggle
And a soft way of patting your cheek
With his grubby little hand,
He is as irresistible
As a puppy.
A pet lamb is his Dear Possession,
It comes with him
To school.
Its name is "Ollie"
And he recites its virtues
By the hour,
He's teaching it, he says,
Its alphabet,
And truly it can bleat
B A A.

Bessie

Bessie is beautiful.
She is eleven
And fair as spring anemones.
A silky braid
Crowns her small head,
And faded shrunken blue
Hangs as a slip
To her brown knees.
A lithe and lovely creature
In the moment of her Youth.

Maggie

Maggie lisps.
    She has short hair,
And would like to be a boy.
Her curse is shyness
    For then her tongue
    Gets twisted.
In utter helplessness
She ties her handkerchief
    In rumpled knots,
And scrunches up her dusty toes.
When she forgets Herself
She has a charming smile,
    Slow and radiant,
    Full of jollity,
When I ask a question
There is a desperate struggle,
She whispers back her answer,
    But at recess
She fights and plays and lives,
Yet cannot find the Key.
    Poor Little One.

Nance

Nance is of the Earth
Most Earthly,
And has found it
Very pleasant, thus;
Simplicity is virtue
Rather than a fault,
Heaven is generous
And Youth is gone
Like woodland flowers.
Nance was built
For Life
And Love,
And therefore took it.
Big as the wind,
An Amazon
As bronzed and beautiful
As Mother Earth;
On Sunday she wears
Pink calico,
And shoes.
But through the week
Her dress is red,

As washed and faded
As Autumn's leaves
(Whose kith and kin she is)
Up the mountain, near the top,
She hunts her cow,
Pausing, now and then
To listen for its bell,
Which has a different tone
From other ones.
Far below
I watch her wandering,
A scarlet shuttle
Through the woodland warp.
The pattern is a simple one,
Yet even in such
The weaver sometimes
Breaks a thread,
And in the finished fabric
Who shall see the knot?

Dexter

Dexter is Nance's child,
Whom she adores.
He's six years old
But delicate.
He loves his kitty,
Nance, and his Great-grandfather,
Who watches bees
The long day through.
He comes to school,
Says "A B C"
Then, like a shadow is gone
To play
Or follow Nance.
They never talk,
And yet their love is proud
And big.
He stands beside her
When she milks
And hoes
And puts the kettle on.
Besides his "jeans"
He has a velvet suit,

(Sears Roebuck, 1910)
Life, after all
Is far more fair
Than Preacher Jones
Would have us think.

Coverlets

Mountain women weave
Bright coverlets
Whose patterns
Are the stories of their lives.
Even their names
Are tales
Of old romance.
Listen to their singing
"Governors Garden
And Olive Leaf,
Rose in the Wilderness
Winding Vine,
Forest Wonder,
And Mountain Rose,
Sixteen Snowballs,
Orange Tree,
Wreaths and Roses,
Summer Wheel,
Parsons Beauty
And Kings Delight,
Star of Venus,
Floating Wave,

Lonely Heart
And Lovers Knot,
Wheel of Time
And Weavers Choice,
Birds of the Air,
Indian Camp,
Blazing Star
And Honey Comb,
Piney Rose and Flowery Plain,''
Back and forth
The shuttle goes,
Warp and woof
The Pattern grows
''Gentlemans Fancy
Or Blooming Rose.''

The Working

Send out the word
For all the men
To come,
A new log house
Is to be raised.
Tall trees,
Walnut
Pine
And oak
Must fall.
Some must be sawed,
Two men working
Back and forth
Back and forth,
Until the teeth
Of the huge saw
Are nearly through the trunk,
Then a peg is driven
And a shout is heard
"Stand back!"
A ripping tear,
A thunder crash,

The great trunk lies down the slope
Heavy, dead,
With all its pride
Of forest years
A heap of sawdust and dry chips.
From Death comes Life,
And soon the logs are cut and notched,
Another day
They will be raised,
With careful art
And old tradition
As architects,
And a new home
Will stand in the forest
Where once the trees
Grew tall.
Wilderness receeds
The kettle boils
And children sing.

Blossoms

Blossoms in these mountains
Have such quaint, delightful names,
They bring to mind old England
And those stately gorgeous dames
Who loitered in their gardens
Among these same most lovely blossoms
With the same delightful names
Three hundred years ago.

"Beauty of Spain," black and gold
What old Romance does your naming hold?
"Seven Sisters" and "Never Still,"
"Sleeping Babe" and "Merry Mill"
"Michaelmas Daisy" and "Autumn Flames."
Sweet are the blossoms and sweet their names.

Sunset

Majestically
The sunset,
Like a great king,
Comes
Bright clad
In crimson robes,
With retinue of splendour
And with far flung pride
The Conqueror proceeds,
While in his train
A gorgeous host
Of minions pass
Into the valley.
Mauve and rose
And beautiful
The dancers follow them,
And windy steeds
Of burnished gold,
With manes aflame
And fire-shod hoofs,
Prance high,
In ecstasy,

We bow
And deep obedience make
Unto the King
Who sees us not, But passes on.

Blue Loveliness

Blue flowers and bluer skies,
Blue days that pass
To where Night, sleeping, lies
Blue shadowed on the grass.

Blue space above the stars
A sapphire arching makes
For Dawn behind whose bars
Blue morning once more breaks.

Ballads and Songs

The moutains are old
But the day is new,
The stories are told
But the tale is true.

My grandmammy sat
At the log house door
Strumming her zither
And humming them o'er.

"Barbara Allen,"
"My Dearest Dear,"
"Cherry Tree Roundel"
And "Seven Long Year."

"Young Lord Lovel,"
"Fair Bettey Anne,"
"Broken Token"
And "False Young Man."

The Teller may change,
The Tale is the same,
Wherever Death,
And Love are the Game.

Will-o-the-Wisp

North and South
And East and West,
Over the hills,
Ever the Quest.

Up and Down
Wanderings best,
Weary the heart,
Never a rest.

Young and Old
Grey toilers be,
Yet one and all
The Vision see.

Night and Day
We live or die,
Hills are steep
But blue the sky.

Contentment

Little log cabin
Under the hill,
Michaelmas daisies
Blossoming still,

Firewood and water,
Good morning and night,
Cheerful uprising
And bedtimes delight:

Life is so simple,
This pattern we weave
Teaches us daily
In God to believe.

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